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# Reagan: Contra aid pact possible

## Willing to 'talk' to get rebels funds

By Bryan Brumley  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON - President Reagan said yesterday he would push for House approval of his proposal to send up to \$70 million in arms to Nicaraguan rebels, but hinted he would listen to offers of compromise.

"I'm going to do my best to convince the House that we should have this. The alternative is unthinkable," Reagan said.

He ruled out a compromise that might delay aid for several months, but said he was "willing to talk and to find out how we can get some practical aid to them in order to pressure the Sandinista government into negotiating for a democratic peace."

"I would have to wait and see what someone offers, who would then obviously be sharing our concern about a democratic solution," Reagan said as he returned to the White House from the presidential retreat at Camp David in Maryland.

Reagan is seeking \$70 million that could be used for weapons and \$30 million in nonlethal aid over 18 months for the Nicaraguan rebels, known as contras.

His proposal and administration attacks on those who oppose it have drawn harsh criticism in Congress, and several legislators urged the president to moderate his position and rhetoric before the House votes on it on March 19.

"I think the request of the president will be defeated in the House on the 19th and then I think there will probably be some

kind of negotiation between the administration and members of both parties of both houses in order to try to reach a different approach," said Rep. Richard A. Gephardt (D-Mo.).

"The Sandinistas have said they will agree to throw out the Soviet and Cuban advisers, and

agree not to run arms to other countries in the region. We haven't called their bluff. We ought to do that first," Gephardt said on the ABC-TV program, "This Week With David Brinkley."

Other members of Congress urged a compromise based on the condition that the administration seek to negotiate an agreement with Nicaragua's leftist Sandinista government before arming the contras.

"I find it difficult to possibly understand how the administration can talk to the Soviet Union, for example, a communist country, can talk to China, for example, a communist country, and refuses to talk to Nicaragua, that is a Marxist-Leninist regime," said Sen. Edward M. Kennedy.

"Negotiations might not be successful. But this administration has basically turned its back on that process," Kennedy said on CBS' interview program, "Face the Nation."

### Meeting rejected

Kennedy said eight Latin American foreign ministers who visited Washington last month to discuss the peace process in Central America sought to meet with Reagan.

"Their request for a meeting with the president was rejected," he said.

However, White House spokesman Edward Djerejian said, as far as he knew, there was no request for such a meeting.

"They came here to meet with Shultz. That was the purpose of the visit," he said, referring to Secretary of State George P. Shultz.

Rep. Michael Barnes (D-Md.), one of the most outspoken opponents of Reagan's proposal, warned that arming the contras "is going to lead to a decision of whether or not to send in US troops.

"If we go down this road toward increased military confrontation in Nicaragua, it leads almost inexorably toward the commitment of US forces, because even the CIA and the Defense Department concede that the contras are not going to succeed in their objective," Barnes said on the NBC interview program "Meet the Press."

### Not looking for compromise

Elliott Abrams, assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs, said Reagan would pressure undecided congressmen to back his proposal.

"The president is not looking for compromise at this point. The president is looking for 218 votes

in the House," Abrams said on NBC.

"I think that a very large number of Democrats and Republicans are looking for a way to give military support to the resistance forces because they want to stop the Soviet penetration of the Americas," he said. "There is a wide split among Democrats ... Many are going to vote for military support for the resistance forces."

The administration opposes any delay in sending aid to the contras because "every month's delay in getting the military assistance they need ... is another month for Soviets and Cubans to kill democratic resistance fighters. It is another month for Soviet helicopters with their Cuban pilots to go around slaughtering people in the field of battle."

Sen. Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.), appearing on NBC, predicted a compromise. "What I have found in the last five years is that if President Reagan ... cannot get exactly what he wants, he is willing to back off a little bit and try and work out something," said Dodd, a member of the Senate

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Foreign Relations Committee and a frequent critic of Reagan's policy.

**Contra leaders deny reports**

Two contra leaders, Alfonso Robelo and Adolfo Calero, said their movement needs US arms, particularly antiaircraft and anti-tank weapons, to maintain a force of about 25,000 fighters.

They denied reports that Sandinista forces have driven the contras out of Nicaragua into neighboring countries, and they insisted that up to 8,000 guerrillas continued to operate in the Central American country.

"They have not been withdrawn. They are being resupplied," Calero said on ABC.

Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger strongly denied that arming the contras would lead to deeper American involvement in the conflict. Aiding the Nicaraguans, Weinberger said on ABC, "is the way to avoid sending American troops by helping now, while there is still time, a force to bring about a real democracy in that country."